

TESTIMONY OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE ISIAH LEGGETT ON THE PLANNING BOARD DRAFT OF THE GAITHERSBURG WEST MASTER PLAN AND ZONING TEXT AMENDMENT 09-07 AMENDING THE LIFE SCIENCES CENTER ZONE

Good Evening Council President Andrews and Councilmembers. My name is Diane Schwartz Jones and I am pleased to provide this testimony on behalf of County Executive Isiah Leggett on the Planning Board Draft of the Gaithersburg West Master Plan and ZTA 09-07 amending the Life Sciences Center Zone.

County Executive Leggett transmitted his comments on the Draft Plan along with a summary of the fiscal impacts of the Plan to Council President Andrews on September 10, 2009. This Plan is critically important to the County's future as a leading location for science based jobs over the next thirty plus years.

The County Executive supports the vision of the Gaithersburg West Master Plan and the changes to the Life Sciences Center Zone that are a critical part of the implementation of the proposed Gaithersburg West Master Plan. The Shady Grove Life Sciences Center has been an important economic engine for Montgomery County and has put the County in a position as a leading center for the life sciences in the entire country.

The life sciences community envisioned by the draft Plan has generated much debate and comments. It is clear that we need to protect our investment in life sciences and create ongoing opportunities for job growth in this employment sector of higher paying jobs. It is also clear though that we need to accomplish our objective in a way that balances other policy considerations such as environmental sustainability, orienting development to mass transit, adequate housing with a mixture of price points, etc. And, we must have a plan that can be accomplished while also reflecting these important principles.

With the spotlight on the need for the United States to become more oriented to science and science based education and jobs, both the Federal government and the States are stepping up their efforts to facilitate a greater role for the United States in the science field through funding of research and the creation of incentives for science based companies and jobs. Our role as local government is to create the hospitable environment in which science based communities – or Communities of Innovation as coined by the Association of University Research Parks – can grow and thrive. Montgomery County, through this plan and companion efforts, can create the opportunities for these higher skilled, higher paying jobs for generations to come. This plan, and this point in time with the Federal and state recognition of the need to develop this employment sector, is a call to action which must not go unheeded.

County Executive Leggett is recommending that the proposed commercial density for the Life Sciences Center be reduced by two million square feet. This recommendation reflects

sufficient density to create a thriving bioscience community while serving as an underpinning for achieving the Corridor Cities Transitway. The density proposed by the County Executive produces significant beneficial environmental and cost impacts on the overall plan. It enables the County to avoid environmentally sensitive areas, reduce the creation of impervious areas and retain significant economic benefit with average annual net revenues of approximately \$31 Million.

The two million square foot reduction of overall plan capacity – from the proposed twenty million to eighteen million square feet of potential commercial development – is expected to eliminate the need for two or more of the interchanges required for the Plan. With the extension of Sam Eig Highway into the Belward campus, the need for interchanges may be further reduced. We would like Park and Planning to model this suggestion at the recommended density.

Interchanges require extensive amounts of land, create additional impervious surfaces and are undertaken only at great expense. With the changes that are proposed by the County Executive, we believe that at a minimum the Key West/Great Seneca Highway and Muddy Branch/Great Seneca Highway interchanges will not be necessary.

Elimination of the Key West/Great Seneca Highway interchange will minimize or possibly entirely avoid impacts to an area that has been designated as environmentally sensitive. We expect that elimination of an interchange at Muddy Branch/Great Seneca Highway will better assure avoidance of a stream at that location as well. Staying out of environmentally sensitive areas is important, but minimizing the need for impervious areas through the elimination of interchanges is also an important outcome from the changes recommended by the County Executive.

Avoiding these interchanges will result in significant savings by eliminating the need to acquire large amounts of costly right-of-way and avoid construction costs of an estimated \$250 Million Dollars. We also expect that this will save approximately 60 condominium units on Hillside Lake Terrace, some of which are MPDUs.

The importance of the Gaithersburg West Master Plan to realization and implementation of the Corridor Cities Transitway should not be underestimated. This mass transit facility has been envisioned for decades. Communities in Clarksburg and Germantown have sprung up in reliance upon the as yet non-existent CCT. And, the Clarksburg and Germantown master plans are predicated on the CCT. The Gaithersburg West Master Plan contributes significantly to the ridership that will make the Corridor Cities Transitway competitive, cost-effective and attainable. MTA has assumed approximately eighteen million total square feet of commercial development in the Life Sciences Center in its analysis. The CCT has proposed stops where there is education, science based jobs, housing and medical facilities.

This plan is a model for sustainable development. It connects a biosciences employment center to related medical facilities, higher education, and housing for workers and students – all oriented to mass transit. We also should not underestimate the need for economic growth. We have wrestled with unprecedented budget shortfalls due to economic conditions. We must create opportunities for economic growth. The draft Gaithersburg West Master Plan at twenty million square feet of commercial space would result in a positive net fiscal impact of \$1.5 Billion over thirty years and average net annual revenues of \$43 Million. At eighteen million square feet of biosciences development, the County will realize a positive net fiscal impact of \$1.1 Billion and average net revenues of \$31 Million.

The Public Safety Training Academy needs to be relocated to allow for the Plan to be implemented. Currently this unrelated use is in the midst of the County's Life Sciences Center. It is the hole in the proverbial donut and an impediment to creation of a thriving research community with adequate housing and an orientation to transit.

The County Executive urges the Council to recognize the importance of this Plan and the Life Sciences Zone to many policy objectives that we need to sustain the County into the future – good jobs; environmentally sensitive development; a mixture of housing; higher education; workforce development; mass transit; and a solid base for fiscal income and growth. It is important that development be properly staged and planned so that it creates proper buffers to nearby communities. This can be done through the Plan and through the Planning Board's review of applications for development approvals.

We have an opportunity that can chart the course for prosperity and opportunity for the County for years to come. With the focus on science funding and investment at the federal and state level and the federal assets currently located in the County, the time is now to create a world-renowned science community. If we do not create the opportunities for knowledge based jobs – the employment sector in which the Federal Government and the State of Maryland have both committed to invest heavily -- they will not happen. The Gaithersburg West Master Plan is an opportunity for the County Council to leave a positive, enduring legacy of a "Community of Innovation."